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INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE

RUEHZU/ASIAN PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION

RUEHZJ/HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7360

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2993

RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2371

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3388

RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 2005

RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 4351

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RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3409

C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 000151

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SUBJECT: JAPAN: MOFA ON BURMA AND DFM SASAE,S RECENT TRIP

Classified By: CDA James P. Zumwalt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Washington and Tokyo &differ in process" regarding Burma "but share the same goals: democracy and rule of law,⁸ MOFA,s First Southeast Asia Director recently told Embassy Tokyo. During a briefing on Deputy Foreign Minister Sasae,s recent visit to Burma, our interlocutor explained that Tokyo is using person-to-person exchanges and humanitarian assistance to engage the Burmese regime while pressing its leadership to address human rights issues, particularly the release of pro-democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi, and to accept a visit by UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) MOFA First Southeast Asia Director Keiichi Ono recently briefed Embassy Tokyo on DFM Kenichiro Sasae,s December 18-20 trip to Burma. During meetings with the Burmese Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister, Sasae highlighted the importance of person-to-person exchanges and economic assistance. Ono described the exchanges as taking place within the context of the &Mekong-Japan Exchange Year⁸*a yearlong program of seminars, political discussions, cultural events, and youth concerts aimed at promoting dialogue among Japanese government and private sector entities and counterparts in Mekong region countries (Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam). Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone kicked off the &Year⁸ during his trip to Cambodia and Laos in early January to much excitement in the region, according to Ono. The program offers Japan many more opportunities to engage Rangoon and to raise international concerns with the Burmese junta, Ono added.

¶3. (C) Japan also is preparing to provide Rangoon an additional USD 13 million in humanitarian aid*water supplies, school refurbishing, and health and sanitation provisions, for example*as part of ongoing cyclone Nargis recovery efforts. This package follows USD 33 million Japan has already disbursed and is included in the supplemental budget that currently awaits passage in the Upper House of Japan,s Diet. Director Ono said he expects the Diet to approve the supplemental request by the end of January.

¶4. (C) The political front remains &most difficult,⁸ according to Ono. Ono repeated Japan,s usual refrain that Tokyo and Washington are using different means to achieve the same goals: democracy, rule of law, and human rights in Burma. Tokyo is encouraging Rangoon to change course. Sasae

pushed his Burmese counterparts on creating results and thus a favorable environment for a visit by UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari. The Burmese regime understands the importance of a visit and is considering ways to make next year's elections successful. Burmese authorities told Sasae that Rangoon is preparing an election committee and election laws, for example.

¶5. (C) Ono expressed his government's disappointment in Washington's handling of the UN Third Committee Resolution on Human Rights in December 2008. He mentioned that although Japan voted in favor of the U.S.-sponsored resolution, Tokyo felt that Washington ignored Japan's requests for softer language that took into account positive developments in Burma. Separately, an official from MOFA's First North American Division told Embassy officers January 20 that Tokyo is increasingly concerned that a hard line approach toward the Burmese junta does not achieve the goals we are both seeking but merely drives Rangoon into a tighter embrace of China. MOFA hoped to use an enhanced dialogue with the new U.S. Administration to explore ways to reengage more constructively with Rangoon, perhaps in the context of preparation for the 2010 Burmese elections.

ZUMWALT